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ABSTRACT

Issues of concern to higher education in Pennsylvania and possible roles for the state government are addressed by a state senator. The difficulty of providing postsecondary education in view of reduced funds is noted. It is suggested that the expectation that adult students will help solve the problem of fewer traditional aged college students should be questioned. There may be a gap between the potential adult education population and the actual population willing to participate in formal classes. Additionally, it takes four or five part-time students to generate one full-time equivalent, and colleges and universities will be competing with industry, the military, and even high schools for the adult education market. It is suggested that if the public is less willing to pay more taxes, it will be necessary to develop a flexible, efficient, low-cost, and accountable system of postsecondary education. The Pennsylvania Senate Bill 551 calls for a citizens commission to study the governance, structure, and financing of postsecondary education. The commission would be composed of legislators and private citizens and would address such fundamental questions as the following: whether the four-year approach to undergraduate education is pricing itself out of existence; whether Pennsylvania can tolerate its patchwork and chaotic classification of postsecondary educational institutions; whether the state should emphasize direct student aid or institutional subsidy; additional approaches, if any, the state adopts to encourage noninstitutional postsecondary education and learning; and whether the state should define with greater precision the purposes, policies, and programs it supports in the private sector. (SW)

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SENATOR JEANETTE F. REIBMAN

State Senate of Pennsylvania

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PROBLEMS AND ISSUES RELATED TO LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: THE STATE DIMENSION

Thank you, Mr. Bittenbender, and my fellow panelists.

It seems to me that some time ago, there was a show on the air for a long period of time called "Ev and Jerry." I'm beginning to think, Hunter, that due to the bulk of the panels we've been sharing, perhaps we ought to bill ourselves as "Jeanette and Hunter." And I guess since you've drawn second spot, you can react to what I am going to say!

I couldn't help but think of Moses when he was given the charge to cross the Red Sea--that of going into a land of milk and honey. You can't run a car on milk and honey, so I guess he should have turned left instead of right; then perhaps, Israel would have had all the oil today. This relates to our situation in Pennsylvania if any analogy can be drawn.

I guess Pennsylvania isn't unique in its problems concerning postsecondary education. I believe postsecondary education across the country is at an important juncture. Pennsylvania, like every other state, faces serious challenges in trying to make available the quality and quantity of postsecondary educational experiences every state would ideally wish to provide. We, like every other state, face serious problems concerning the financing and governance of postsecondary education. And I think there are some crucial answers to the question concerning, "What does it mean to be educated in the final quarter of the 20th century?" The importance of these answers should force every professional educator in these days of trade unionism to seriously examine them. I feel (and I'm an optimist) that we in Pennsylvania can meet our challenges because I believe we must. Furthermore, I think we can address the issues and problems, but not without some very important changes.

Across the nation, one college every month is closing its doors. We, here in Pennsylvania, have 191 degree-granting institutions. If our economic plight does not improve markedly and rapidly, and if our lower demographic projections for the traditional college population of 18 to 22 year old holds true, we, in Pennsylvania, will be closing doors too. However, I hasten to add it is <u>not</u> the case that postsecondary education, broadly construed, is about to

collapse. As organized religion continues to lose its ability to provide many people with a sense of personal meaning and yields ground to some sort of secular humanism and as rapidly increasing technological change creates simultaneously new vocational dislocation and opportunity, the outlook for postsecondary education does indeed brighten. People are turning and will increasingly turn to educational experiences and activity to give meaning to their lives. I believe people are turning and will continue to turn to education because vocational and economic reality will demand that they do so. These developments make the vision of a "learning society" more than just a mere platitude. This is particularly true when one reviews the incredible technological advances in the storage for processing and communication of information--ranging from computers to television, to cassettes, to the recently developed video discs. These video disks will allow many people to purchase at low cost televised broadcasts just as we now purchase the recordings of DeBussy, Gershwin, or rock and roll. Thus, the outlook for learning beyond high school is generally bright.

What we must do now is to find the right vessel on which to ride these waves toward the shores of the learning society. We must ask ourselves whether our current ways of financing, governing, structuring, and delivering postsecondary educational services, not only in this state, but across the country, are appropriate to this vital social and educational task. This means talking about institutions-schools and their relationship to the public interest. Specifically, this means talking about the relationship of postsecondary institutions to state governments . . . with those individuals in the legislative and executive branches who are authorized to <u>interpret</u> the public interest.

State level officials, like many other people, both in and out of the postsecondary educational community, are increasingly reluctant to equate the health of institutions with the health of education. Fewer people are willing to treat schools as ends in themselves. There is, I believe, a growing feeling that simply giving more money to post-secondary institutions <u>carte blanche</u> will not do the social and education job that needs to be done. In Pennsylvania, these feelings are growing--despite the proposed cutback in our grant program and despite last year's legislative grant of $12 million to private institutions in the form of institutional assistance grants. Also, it is true that the relatively lean proposed state budget (not only in Pennsylvania, but I dare say across the country) for postsecondary education is partially caused by state and national economic recession which require massive amounts of additional funding for welfare and public assistance.

However, I don't think we should let ourselves be fooled into viewing our present situation as a mere interlude caused by the current economic dislocation. I believe we are not in the mere interval between periods of rapid expansion of traditional services and populations. This is true not only because of shrinking traditional student population, but because new and legitimate demands are being made on public funds not being made a few years ago--demands, for example, to protect and restore the environment. Milton Friedman, the conservative economist at the University of Chicago, recently estimated that forty cents out of every dollar you and I earn goes to support the cost of government at the local, state, and national levels. While I think it is easy to underestimate the numerous valuable services rendered by government and while there are many additional public needs and injustices government should try to ameliorate, we have reached a plateau in the taxpayer's willingness to support additional programs.

Hence, the challenge--and I don't need to remind you that it's going to be a very difficult one--is to move closer to the learning society in an economically stagnant period where institutional retrenchment is more likely than expansion.

Maybe many of you are wondering why I have ignored the increasing numbers of adults who are taking courses at colleges and universities. It is true that a trend in this direction has prompted one of my legislative colleagues to suggest (wrongfully I hope!) that whereas branch campuses of large universities were the postsecondary institutional battleground of the sixties, adult education will be the battleground of the seventies. To the extent that institutions can attract and meet the needs of these older populations, I heartily support the trend, but a word of caution: While the <u>potential</u> adult education population is tremendous, the <u>actual</u> population willing to participate in formal classes may be considerably smaller! Too many adults in our society still view schooling at any level as for those who cannot manage their own affairs. Furthermore, it takes four or five part-time students to generate one full-time equivalency. Finally, colleges and universities will be competing with industry, the military, and even high schools for the adult education market.

Thus, if there are real limits to the amount of financial help which colleges and universities can expect from the adult population and if colleges and universities continue to look at state and federal governments for indirect aid through students or direct institutional subsidies, then we, as a society, are going to take seriously the distinction between postsecondary schooling and postsecondary

education or learning. This type of education may require little or no direct contact with colleges or faculty. If we have reached a plateau in the public's willingness to pay more taxes, then our task becomes one of developing a flexible, efficient, low-cost, and accountable system of postsecondary educational experiences, programs, and institutions. There is more than a small amount of conflict and tension among the characteristics of this ideal system.

Reconciling accountability and flexibility is, of course, not very easy. And the need for a low-cost system lies in the face of the demands of faculty unionism. The salaries of professional and non-professional employees, as you well know, account for over 85% of the budget of many institutions. But progress toward the learning society demands nothing less. Because of the magnitude of these questions and because I believe some systematic thought on these issues is needed, I have introduced Senate Bill 551 in the Pennsylvania Senate.

Senate Bill 551 calls for a citizens commission to study the governance, structure, and financing of postsecondary education for one year before making recommendations to the General Assembly, the governor, and the public. The commission would be composed of ten legislators, five senators appointed by the president pro tem, five House members appointed by the Speaker of the House, and eleven private citizens. I included private citizens because I do not think we should have commission representatives of the various institutions or interest groups. It should be primarily a citizens commission. It is my sincere hope and intention that the commission deal with such fundamental questions as the following:

1. Is the four-year approach to under-graduate education pricing itself out of existence? Since there is a high degree of duplication between the senior year of high school and the freshman year of college, maybe we need to alter the nature of these transitional years.

2. Can Pennsylvania tolerate its patchwork and chaotic classification of postsecondary educational institutions? Among the 191, we have classifications such as: state-owned, which are our fourteen state colleges; state-related, which includes Penn State University, the University of Pittsburgh, Temple University, and Lincoln University; state-aided, which includes institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania here in Philadelphia, community colleges, independent colleges, and proprietary institutions. These institutions receive different amounts of money from the state based on their classification. If our current economic woes get worse, some institutions may try to "graduate" to

classifications which receive more money from the state. Without better criteria to determine how an institution graduates from one category to another, such decisions will inevitably be based more on the "political clout" than on any rational criteria.

3. Should the state emphasize direct student aid or institutional subsidy? If some institutions are to close, should it be the result of the marketplace or conscious state-level policy?

4. Are there any advantages to be gained by moving toward a more comprehensive system involving all of the classifications?

5. What additional approaches, if any, should the state adopt to encourage non-institutional postsecondary education and learning?

6. Are some citizens of the commonwealth being slighted with regard to educational opportunity because of geographic locations, a problem which is not unique to Pennsylvania?

7. Should the state define with greater precision the purposes, policies, and programs it supports in the private sector? Should the state make greater use of contracts with private colleges for specific services, rather than adding subsidies to their general fund?

These are some of the questions which we, in Pennsylvania, are raising. These are problems which <u>every</u> state must face if education, formal and informal, is to play a great role in the lives of our citizens. I hope our open discussion can give some perspectives to this problem and look to state coordinating officers to take a bold leadership role in finding the answers.

Thank you.